

Book in Review

Reality and Fiction in Modern Japanese Literature.

By Noriko Mizuta Lippit. New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1980. Pp. xi+219.

Recently the study of Modern Japanese literature has advanced from translation or study of a single author's work to a more comprehensive and synthetic approach to several writers or literary concepts through certain theoretical perspectives. Following this line and succeeding to Ueda Makoto's *Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature* (Stanford University Press, 1976) and J. Thomas Rimer's *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1978), Professor Lippit's *Reality and Fiction in Modern Japanese Literature* has now come into view.

The main purpose of the book is to present a perspective of modern Japanese writers as viewed from their concern about the relation of their art to the self, reality and Japan's cultural tradition. The writers dealt with include the major ones like Akutagawa, Tanizaki, Kawabata, Yokomitsu and Mishima, and two infrequently discussed woman writers, Miyamoto Yuriko and Tomioka Taeko.

The book has absorbed for the most part Japanese materials and Japanese scholars' critical opinions. It comprises eleven chapters which, according to nature and subject matter, can be grouped under four heads: 1) treatments of a specific genre, i.e. the I-novel; 2) studies of individual authors; 3) discussions of literary controversies or debates; and 4) comparative studies in terms of Western influences.

It has been maintained that the I-novel was the dominating literary form of the late Meiji period (1868-1912) and the writers of the Taisho (1912-1926) and early Shōwa (1926-present) took the I-novel as their point of departure and turned to either Marxism or aestheticism (in part, modernism), *en route* to searching the self and reality in the relation between art and the artist's life as well as art and social life. In dealing with the aspects

of the I-novel and the opposition and interaction of different literary concepts, such as realism and romanticism, or different literary ideologies, such as Marxism and aestheticism, the book represents in profile a history of modern Japanese literature.

As the developments of both Chinese and Japanese literatures in the modern period have undergone very similar Western influences, the book particularly interests the Chinese reader of comparative literature. The Chinese counterparts of realism, romanticism, social realism, aestheticism, modernism, their reactions and interactions in the context of literary controversy, as well as Chinese followers of Western writers, all seem to provide intriguing subjects for comparative studies. Such examples as the following occur to me: Yü Ta-fu and the I-novelist Tayama Katai, Chinese debates over Revolutionary literature during 1928-30 and the Japanese controversy over Socialist Realism during the middle to late Taishō period (1912-1926), not to mention Poe or Baudelaire in China and Japan.

As the author's main concern is about the relation of art to the self, or the question of the self and literature and of literature and reality as seen in modern Japanese literature, the intrinsic value of a literary work as art seems beside the question. The artistic merit of the major writers like Tanizaki and Kawabata has been well recognized and appreciated. However, as to the proletarian writer Miyamoto Yuriko and the rising poet-novelist Tomioka Taeko, since they are as yet unfamiliar to the English reader, their artistic achievements, it seems to me, call for more critical judgment. In passing I should mention that in the next printing a bibliography and an index to such a scholarly book would be not merely desirable but also a necessity for the reader's convenience.

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